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ABSTRACT

In college-level forensic competitions, the three major weekly magazines, "U.S. News and World Report," "Time," and "Newsweek," are taking a beating. Students are purposely looking for specialized sources; they firmly believe that judges look down on the use of these weekly publications. Indeed, judges do seem to be rewarding students for the number of sources as well as their uniqueness. The advantage to this trend is that students are learning the importance of an argument well-grounded in diverse sources. Furthermore, students are learning to do computer searches for unique sources, which improves their research abilities and prepares them for future careers in business and law. However, the disadvantage to this trend is that younger college students do not always have the background and skills to understand and critically evaluate the sources they find on the computer. A snowball of bad arguments is made when beginners end up offering contradictory testimony and information from slanted or biased sources. Participants and judges must return to focusing on the arguments themselves and not on the number and uniqueness of the sources. Emphasizing the novelty in documentation at the risk of good analysis and communication skills would only be detrimental to the philosophical purposes of the activity. (TB)

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Changing Types of Sources for Extemporaneous Speaking

Paper presented at the 1994 Convention
of the Speech Communication Association,
New Orleans, Louisiana

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Abstract

In the past few years more and more emphasis has been placed on unique sources and the more common weekly publications are starting to be looked at with disdain. Whether this is right or wrong, it is important to look at this trend in documentation. The purpose of this paper is to focus attention on the growing controversy surrounding the use of sources in extemporaneous speaking by examining the trend in documentation and contemplating the advantages versus disadvantages of continuing with this move away from non-mainstream sources. With more sources available electronically everyday, students must be taught how to properly understand the information they are sharing with their audiences. (109 Words)

There is a continual struggle in forensic competitions to find the advantages in individual events that allow participants to shine over their opponents. Finding new ways to hold the script book in interpretative events, using state of the arts visual aids in the prepared speaking events, and using unique forms of documentation in the limited preparation events are techniques currently being tested and encouraged by coaches, judges, and participants. However, with change comes risks. In the realm of extemporaneous speaking the biggest change involves the use of sources and how they are cited within speeches. With the information superhighway new resources can be easily accessed and used in researching topics. This has allowed many extempers to expand their filing system and cite non-mainstream sources in their speeches. In the past few years more and more emphasis has been placed on unique sources and the more common weekly publications are starting to be looked at with disdain. Whether this is right or wrong, it is important to look at this trend in documentation. After all, "documentation serves as a valuable tool to establish an extemporaneous speaker's credibility. Dealing with topics of crucial domestic and foreign concern, require the support of those who are experts in the field. Therefore, strategies for enhancing the use of documentation in extemporaneous speaking merit attention" (Joraanstad, 1989 p. 55). The purpose of this paper is to focus attention on the growing controversy surrounding the use of sources in extemporaneous speaking by examining the trend in documentation and contemplating the advantages versus disadvantages of continuing with this move away from non-mainstream sources.

Controversy

On the college level the three major weekly magazines are taking a strong beating. For the past two years at the AFA-NIET tournament (1993 and 1994) the final rounds of extemporaneous speaking have not yielded one citation from Time, Newsweek, or US News and World Report. After speaking to some of the national competitors they admitted to purposely searching for a specialized source rather than taking the risk of using a common weekly magazine. They firmly believe that judges look down at the use of these

weekly publications. They might be right. Judges do seem to reward students for citations which are "more than the usual news magazines" (T. Lewis as cited in Schnoor, 1994). With this belief entrenched in their approach towards the event, experienced competitors are exploring every possible angle except that offered by the mainstream publications. For example, in 1993, the AFA extemp champion chose a question concerning US aid to Peru. His documentation included sources from the Official News Magazine of the Sandinista party of Nicaragua to the Japanese Times newspaper to the Journal on Terrorism and Political Violence. In all honesty the speaker did use some familiar sources such as the London Financial Times, and Current History, he just didn't choose to cite mainstream sources. Another speaker that same year chose the question: How will the Middle East peace talks affect Israeli relations with China? The speaker used seven different sources in his speech. The sources he used were: Arab News, Middle East International Review, CNN, Jerusalem Post, Beijing Review, Christian Science Monitor, and Orbus International Journal of World Affairs. These examples are not atypical of the direction students are taking with their research in this event. In 1994, the sources were still extremely specialized. There were more US based sources such as the New York Times, The Christian Science Monitor, and the Wall Street Journal but foreign based sources still prevailed. Sources such as the Nie Kie Weekly, the Moscow News, the Russian East Asian Journal of Finance and Trade, the Manchester Guardian Weekly, and the Japanese Journal of Trade and Industry are sources that extempers take pride in using in their speeches.

This controversy over the need for specialized sources can first be documented in a series of conversations in March of 1994 on the I.E.-list serve based out of Cornell University. While the list serve should be recognized as an open forum for free discussion, some of the conclusions of these conversations were very disheartening. Experienced extempers snubbed their noses at the thought of anyone wanting to use mainstream sources. The word "Bleech!" stands out as a reaction to the use of mainstream

citations at the 1992 NFA finals rounds of extemporaneous speaking (I.E.-list serve, 1994). The questions that year were all based on the US presidential elections. The trend in the list serve conversations as well as at tournaments confirms the move away from common sources and the movement towards emphasizing the particular.

Students are not the only ones spawning this controversy. Judges are rewarding students for the number of sources they are using as well as the uniqueness of their sources. It is common practice to mark down the number of sources students are using. For many judges, if students haven't used at least five different sources within a speech this does not meet a minimum requirement for a competitive speech. If students do use five different sources judges will then focus on the type of references used. After examining the 1991 and 1992 AFA and NFA published judges critiques, only one judge asked for qualifications of sources. Others complimented the number and variety of citations the champions offered in their speech. In district VII this trend on variety of citations is really strong. My student's ballots continually have slash marks for quantity of sources cited as well as comments on quality. Comments encouraging students to find more unique sources fosters the idea that more is always better. But is it?

Advantages

The use of evidence in extemporaneous speaking is very important in creating strong well-grounded arguments. As most beginning public speaking textbooks will tell us, supporting materials help clarify, amplify, and strengthen the ideas in a speech. It is evidence which helps speakers support their claims. However, without proper usage evidence can also destroy speaker's claims. Knowing how to use the evidence properly is a necessity.

When examining the types of evidence to use in speeches, Gronbeck, McKerrow, Ehninger, and Monroe (1994, pg. 450). suggest asking two questions to determine what will motivate a listener, first; "What type of evidence will the audience demand?" and second; "Which specific pieces of evidence will your listeners be most responsive to?

The first question is answered by looking at the trend towards non-mainstream sources. Experienced judges are asking for more varied sources and contestants are responding. Speakers assume that their target audience is demanding arguments supported not only by expert testimony and statistics, but, also testimony from the country of origin for this topic. The advantages of assuming the audience is demanding unique sources are plentiful. First of all, it is forcing students to develop solid research and analytical skills. Participants are exposed to a wide variety of methods of gathering information-- from the traditional magazine scavenging to electronically retrieving information possibilities abound. Once they know where to locate information then they can determine the relevance and rationale of using each type of evidence. With practice participants can use the evidence to fit the direction of the argument they are advocating. It is the successful national competitors who are using the non-mainstream sources to create solid arguments which expose differing viewpoints. Second of all, it can aid students in their daily life as well as competition. Bernard (1992) points out in his article, "knowing where to find information and how to use it, aids students in the long run in classes, business, and law." These extempers have the ability to create and analyze arguments. Pulling together liberal and conservative viewpoints to create plausible policies and theories can help students develop confidence in their abilities to handle other tasks and problems put before them. Finally, the largest advantage is for the audience. Having different sources to back themselves up allows the students to effectively answer the questions at hand and prove their conclusions to trained listeners. The trained audience has the opportunity to hear the best and most current information on a topic.

Disadvantages

The second question, "what will the listeners be the most responsive to?" can be answered by looking at the disadvantages of using unique sources. While using the Nie Kie Weekly may sound good to the judges, it does not always help the lay audience understand or respond to the information being presented. The main goal of any speech is

to create an understanding of the message with the audience. Unfortunately, most college students are unaware of current-events (Lucas and Schmitz, 1988). Also, some judges are uninformed about current events and even about the event of extemporaneous speaking that they are judging. The expert sources can become too detailed and specific for audiences to understand and audiences don't have the knowledge to criticize the sources being heard. "Excepting well-known foreign sources such as *Le Monde* and the Times, neither the student nor the judge is familiar with the source cited and is therefore unable to test the credibility of the source. (Holland, 1994, p. 12)" Participants must be able to criticize the sources that are being used. Unfortunately, in the quest for nonmainstream sources the purposes of sharing knowledge and information with the audience is being lost and a quest for the best evidence citations is being undertaken.

Lack of source credibility testing creates another disadvantage for speakers and listeners. There are some experienced extempers who have the ability to handle the use of unique sources, but the beginners who are just undertaking this event do not have the experience or the knowledge to be using these sources accurately. A snowball of bad arguments are made when our beginners try to use non-mainstream sources and fail to create valid arguments from the information presented and end up offering contradictory testimony and information from slanted or biased sources. Students and judges who are not exceptionally knowledgeable in current events risk bastardizing sources if they are not somewhat familiar with the ideological backgrounds of the sources being cited. Unlike debate where there is a dialogue between participants and judges, there is no questioning of sources credibility or accuracy of context. Again, upon review of the AFA 1993 and 1994 final rounds of extemporaneous speaking, rarely was there a qualification or disclaimer on articles using general information. For examples, citing the Moscow News of February 22, 1993 yielded no explanation of who wrote the article or what the slant was on the subject being covered in the paper. While we like to assume that extempers are as

forthcoming and fair in their disclosure of the information as possible, we cannot assume that the information was unbiased or that it was not taken out of context.
Students catch on quickly that the more obscure sources receive more positive comments from judges. For many students this creates problems in argument formation and substantiation. A snowball of poor arguments are made when our beginners try to use non-mainstream sources and fail to create valid arguments from the information presented and end up offering contradictory testimony and information from slanted or biased sources. So how should sources be used?

Recommendations

I believe participants and judges must return to focusing on the arguments and not the number and uniqueness of the sources. Emphasizing novelty in documentation at the risk of good argumentation, analysis, and communication skills would be detrimental to the philosophical purposes of the activity. Drawing a parallel between debate and the future of extemporaneous speaking we can see what may await this event if heavy emphasis is placed on finding unique and non-mainstream sources. Debate teams spend hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars each semester scrambling for the most distinct sources. The communicative intent of the activity is lost and emphasis on research takes precedence. We must first teach our students how to create strong arguments then work for more complexity in source citations as they improve their skills.

Starting with the weekly magazines offers a good foundation and summary of important news events. I would like to see students using general weekly magazines such as Time, Newsweek, and US News and World Report. These magazines offer good summaries and interviews from some of the world's leaders in politics, education, economics, and the environment. They provide necessary information useful in analyzing popular opinion, offering general knowledge and summaries of incidents happening around the world. The popular weeklies also help the lay audience relate to topics more easily. These sources are comfortable for beginning and experienced extempers and audiences.

The strength of these sources is often understated. To discourage our students from using these sources is a mistake. I just don't believe students should be penalized for using these sources--especially if they use them effectively. However, I do recognize the need for added diversity in sources. While the weeklies offer solid information, they should not be all that students rely on for information gathering.

I am not advocating only using the weekly magazines for citations because moving beyond weeklies such as Time, Newsweek, and US News and World Report is necessary if the forensics community is trying to instill good research and analytical skills in our students. Encouraging students to find primary sources when appropriate and using the best variety of secondary sources is vital if extemporaneous speaking is going to move beyond a seven minute news summary. We must encourage students to include political and moral theory from historical as well as modern perspectives. With more sources available electronically everyday, students must be taught how to properly understand the information they are sharing with their audiences. Also, in the new age of technology students should strive to research their topics and not simply regurgitate information. Research means learning about the ideological beliefs of the sources and people being cited. Research means being knowledgeable enough on the subject to offer full qualifications and disclaimers on sources when appropriate. Research means knowing as much about the sources you are using as the topic you are addressing.

The search for the edge over opponents will continue. The controversy over source documentation is just beginning. I believe that if students combine knowledge of argument formation with a variety of sources --mainstream and nonmainstream-- that the speech will be a communicative success, because it is the good man speaking well who will achieve his goal.

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